

## Come and See

John 1:43-51

Epiphany 3B

JAN 18 2009

Jesus had 12 disciples, 12 people to follow him from town to town, 12 people to help him as he taught, 12 people who would become his witnesses to the cross and resurrection. Why did they follow him? They found what they were looking for when they met Jesus.

How long had they been looking? I don't know -- maybe a few weeks, maybe their whole lives. Andrew and Peter had walked many miles out into the desert to listen to John the Baptist by the Jordan River. No one would walk so far out of casual curiosity, they were looking for something that had been missing in their lives, something that would answer their questions, something that would fill the gaps, something that would give meaning and purpose.

I wrote that last sentence on Friday. As soon as I wrote it I realized it sounded just like a pompous seminary professor. So let me say it simple: they felt stuck and they were looking for something new.

So the story is all about those twelve looking. But here is something worth remembering about this story: as much as they were looking for someone like Jesus, Jesus was already looking for them. This means, of course, that as much as you look for him, he's already looking for you!

Philip told Nathanael about Jesus. When Nathanael came to see Jesus for himself, he was surprised that Jesus already knew who he was. "I saw you studying and praying under the shade of the tree," Jesus told him. Jesus already knew that Nathanael was looking for something. Jesus wasn't looking at random, he was noticing the people who were ready.

Think for a moment about the places where Jesus has been looking for you - not where you would look for him, but where he's been looking for you ... in your living room, out in the barn, at your sister's house, at school, in the lunchroom, at the bar, in the hospital, out in the field, on the beach, at the park ... where else?

For some reason I always had the impression that the religious life is something like a narrow path up a steep mountain, with many dangers, and obstacles along the way. But that's not how the gospel tells it: as much as you are looking for him, Jesus is looking even harder for you.

My mother has been doing family tree research for many years, trying to trace back both sides of my family as far as she can into the past. For the longest time one of the family branches ended with a big question mark, because one of the great-great uncles had gone west and was never heard from again. She has even traveled to tiny villages in northern Vermont looking for clues and leads to no avail. Then one day,

she got a telephone call from a man in Texas. He explained that he was doing genealogical research that had brought him to the public records office in a small Vermont village. The man in Texas was a distant cousin who was trying to fill in the question mark on his family tree and his family was the part my mother had been missing. She was delighted to discover that the one she had been searching for had been looking for her at the same time, and the village clerk in that small town put them in touch. I hope that we can be like that village clerk in northern Vermont, helping the ones who are looking for Jesus know that Jesus is already looking for them.

"What are you looking for?" Jesus asks a penetrating, searching question, that pushes us to set our aim high, not low. He challenges us to be honest about who we are and what we lack and what we need.

"What are you looking for?" It's a practical question. Andrew says that he wants to know where Jesus lives, so he can stop by to talk some more. Jesus responds, "Sure, stop on over any time!"

"What are you looking for?" It's a spiritual question, too. Nathanael liked to sit under the fig tree studying the words of scripture, dreaming about a world at peace. Jesus detected the yearning for peace in Nathanael's heart. "Come on, Nathanael, you're a good man, you and I will dream together."

In my life I have met many who are looking. Maybe you have too. Those who are looking for something. There was the man whose wife had left him. He came to church looking for answers. There are teenagers I know whose lives are full of confusion. They come to church looking for ways to make wiser choices about friends, and school, peer pressures, and family matters. There is an elderly woman who told me of a tragedy that happened to her when she was very young. No one else knows about it, but seventy years later she's still looking for healing. There are young children who come to the church looking for love and friendship and - why not - we have lots to share! There are adults who come, looking for the strength to be better parents, looking for peace in the middle of life's chaos, looking for spiritual food in hungry times.

What are we looking for? We are looking for truth, love and forgiveness in action. We are looking for something that we can count on. We are looking for love that is unconditional, we are looking for forgiveness that is never runs out, we are looking for truth that is unassailable. We've had enough of love that is temporary. We've had enough of forgiveness that is out to lunch. We've had enough of truth that doesn't know the difference between right and wrong. "What are you looking for?" Jesus asked them. "Come and see!" So they took a look. Very soon, they knew that he was the one.

